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ABSTRACT

In this booklet, a group of middle school teachers offer suggestions on how other teachers can similarly enhance their own school's service learning program by initiating and sustaining a service learning task force. The teachers begin by explaining why they developed a service learning task force and list some of the benefits of having a service learning task force. Next, they discuss the following steps in forming a task force: gain administrative support; educate your faculty about service learning; establish the service learning task force; select a service learning task force coordinator; and set up a regular meeting time. After a brief discussion of the characteristics of a service learning task force member, the following roles of specific task force members are detailed: student members, faculty members, parents, service agency representatives, community leaders, and coordinator. Eleven responsibilities of the service learning task force are identified. Concluding the booklet are the addresses of four national organizations with information about service learning. (MN)

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ED 430 132

LINKING LEARNING WITH LIFE

Igniting the Flame

Establishing a Service Learning Task Force

CE 078 659

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Igniting the Flame

Establishing a Service Learning Task Force

by Wren Middle School Faculty

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Igniting the Flame

Picture a burning stick of wood that glows brighter and gives off more heat and light when it is added to other burning sticks or logs on a campfire. However, if that same stick is removed from the other ignited sticks, it will smolder and eventually burn out.

Many educators who work with young people in service learning are somewhat like the burning stick. One person who has been trained and has the desire can work with a group of students to implement service learning. However, the chance of this person successfully integrating service learning into all areas is difficult. A group of like-minded, trained, and committed people can make service learning an accepted and expected teaching method throughout the entire school. You must start with a spark and join together to continue to give light and warmth to all involved.

To Our Fellow Educators

Like many schools, our middle school was first involved in community service before we learned about service learning. We had a school environment that valued service and encouraged schoolwide participation in a variety of activities such as book drives and charitable fundraisers.

Things really started to change, however, when a small group of us took a summer course in the integration of service learning into school curriculum. Returning to our school that fall, we began to make changes—changes that have brought our school to be a nationally and internationally recognized service learning program. And we have learned many things as a result of those changes.

Over the years, we have learned that the establishment of a service learning task force has been the vital spirit sustaining our school's service learning program.

We have met and observed many outstanding teachers who have employed service learning in their classes. Yet, frequently, their efforts are isolated. The attempt to fully integrate service learning into a school's program cannot be successful if it becomes the effort of only one person or even a small group of individuals. In fact, as we read in *Educational Leadership* (November, 1993), "if the program was pushed by one person, when that person left, the program would be dead. But even if seven or eight people are making the decisions, the likelihood of survival is great."

We have found from our experience that this is true. As members of the school's service learning task force since its inception, we hope to offer to the reader, whether a service learning novice or a seasoned practitioner, the steps that need to be taken to develop a successful schoolwide service learning program.

In this book, we offer suggestions on how to initiate and sustain a service learning task force so it can enhance your school's service learning program. We hope that you will benefit from our many years of trial and error learning so that you can begin to achieve success in your school.

Teachers on the Wren Middle School Service Learning Task Force

Lynn Brown	*Treva Davis*	*Mike Hughes*
Joyce Joy	*Amy Parker*	*Susan Wolfe*

Wren Middle School is a National Youth Leadership Council Generator School and serves as a model site in service learning implementation.

Why Did We Develop a Service Learning Task Force?

Looking back, we realized we had many reasons for developing our task force. We needed:

- to coordinate our schoolwide service projects—a group to help develop and design classroom or club team service learning projects each month
- to provide our teachers with outlines of ideas to use in the classroom based on the schoolwide projects, knowing our teachers would feel more comfortable with these outlines at the start-up of the service learning program
- to motivate and encourage the implementation of service learning in all aspects of our school program, from gifted to resource—all students should be involved in service learning experiences related to their academic and activity classes
- to generate ideas and enthusiasm for all service learning projects
- to establish an organization that would identify and coordinate the needs, concerns, and ideas from throughout the school and community
- to monitor and evaluate our past projects, reflecting on their merits and determining if true service learning was being accomplished
- to unify our school and community towards common goals

Benefits of Having a Service Learning Task Force

We have found that a service learning task force can be of benefit to the overall service learning program because it:

- joins together like-minded people who work together for the good of a larger group
- alleviates the stress and thus burnout of one person trying to incorporate service learning into all academic areas
- gives ownership to all involved
- utilizes the expertise of many individuals
- has in place a way to sustain itself as individuals leave or resign
- provides leadership for grant proposals and other fundraising opportunities
- conforms to the idea of school reform, cooperative learning, and site-based management
- becomes the school's voice as opposed to the voice of only one person
- combines the energy of several individuals
- taps ideas for schoolwide projects and allows for brainstorming ideas for many areas
- disseminates information on ways to implement service learning into the curriculum

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Five Steps for Getting Started

Step One: Gain Administrative Support

In order to develop a school-based service learning task force, the support from your school and district's administration is extremely important. With their understanding of the value of service learning and the many benefits to the students and the school, you will be able to accomplish your goals. Once you have their support, it is important to inform and involve them. Be sure you include the principal and other administrators in the educational process of your initial awareness raising. Some ways to encourage support from your administrators include the following:

- Invite the administrators to participate or sponsor a service learning project.
- Have the students write thank you notes to the principal for the opportunity to help others.
- Involve the principal in the positive media coverage generated by service learning activities, giving them the opportunity to be quoted.
- Encourage parents of your students to show their continued support of service learning; they can be influential with the school and district administrators.
- Inform other parents and community members of your activities at PTO/A meetings and through the school newsletter so they can also let administrators know of their support.
- Keep your administrators abreast of your projects and successes.
- Locate other funding sources for service learning so you do not continually ask your principal for money to run your program.

Step Two: Educate Your Faculty About Service Learning

When introducing service learning to the faculty, a major shift in teachers' mindsets has to occur. Teachers must understand that service learning is not an addition to the work load; it is another teaching technique to utilize. They need to gain an understanding that it can benefit their students' learning as well as the effectiveness of their own teaching. It is important that they see that all students, regardless of ability levels, socioeconomic status, or number of disciplinary referrals, can gain valuable experiences by participating in service learning activities. These experiences can develop students' self-efficacy, civic responsibility, and basic academic skills, and can help them to see the relevancy of academic skills to real life and future career goals. The faculty and administrators must be open to the idea that service learning can change the school's culture for the better.

To inform educators of the methodology of service learning, a summer course was offered in our district. As a result, we had a core group of enthusiastic and interested teachers well educated in the methodology of service learning. These teachers were instrumental in lighting the fire of service learning at our school.

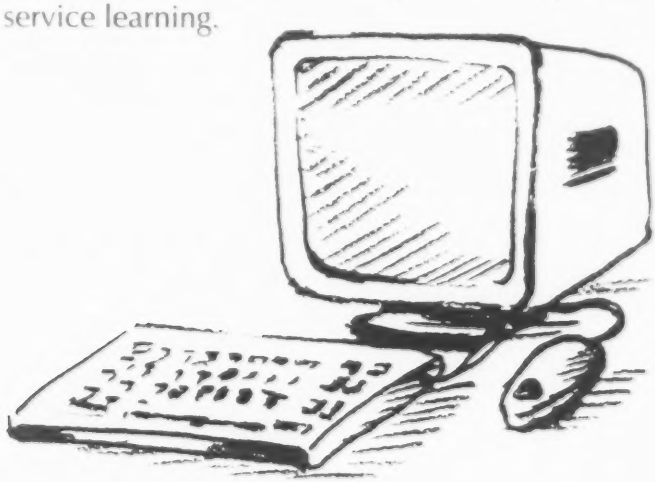
This team of teachers built interest and spread enthusiasm for service learning as a viable teaching tool. The knowledge gained from the summer course supplied the credibility among teachers to get service learning off to a great start. These trained teachers were important in providing in-service workshops for other teachers.

In addition to a graduate course on service learning, there are other ways that such a core group of teachers can be trained. Opportunities

available for training teachers include:

- local staff development programs
- site visits to other schools involved in service learning
- attendance at state, regional, or national conferences
- personal reading
- a thorough examination of the National Service Learning Clearinghouse web site
- actual participation in service learning experiences with peers
- training programs offered by 4-H, Quest International, etc.
- regional training and technical assistance provided by regional centers of the National Service Learning Cooperative, Service Learning Ambassadors, or Peer Consultants

Once the core group of teachers has been trained, they can become the school's resource for training the other faculty and administrative staff. To successfully complete this first step, the core group of teachers will have raised the awareness of the entire faculty so that they have a basic knowledge of service learning.



Step Three: Establish the Service Learning Task Force

It is time to establish the service learning task force. The task force should be comprised of the following:

- a faculty member from each academic team or department
- a school administrator or counselor
- a student representative from each grade or team
- community leaders and/or senior citizens
- parents
- representatives from community agencies

The number of individuals on your service learning task force is negotiable, but we have found that 15 has worked well for us.

Because of their previous training in service learning, those teachers with the most interest quickly volunteered to become members of the task force. It is highly advisable that the students come from all areas of the student body. Some of our most creative members are those not viewed as student leaders by their peers, but who have a great understanding of the needs of others. Our task force is racially mixed and also has equal representation from both sexes. We have not only chosen those students who have much to offer to the group, but also those students who need desperately to belong to a group to aid in their own growth. We have never had a student turn down the opportunity to be on the task force. Many have requested to be on it, and we are now discussing the possibility of having students apply. We are

concerned, however, that we know this might eliminate those who may need to be a part of the group but would never take the initiative to apply.

Each task force member must be seen as an equal partner, and all should have equal opportunities for input. The service learning task force should become the driving force to establish a service learning school culture.

Step Four: Select a Service Learning Task Force Coordinator

In the development of the task force, it became evident that a single contact person had to be selected. A lead person had to emerge. This person may have more unencumbered time during the day to make and receive telephone calls and meet with students and faculty to plan. This person may or may not take the title of chairperson, but basically that is the role that needs to be performed.

Step Five: Set Up a Regular Meeting Time

The task force should meet periodically to plan and evaluate activities. Our group meets once a month on an agreed upon day after school so this date can be put on the members' calendars in advance. We also meet over the summer to plan activities for the new school year and to write grants as they become available. Our administrator agrees to give the faculty members compensatory time on district staff development days for our task force work over the summer.

Characteristics of a Service Learning Task Force Member

A service learning task force member must have many of the following characteristics:

- understands the difference between community service and service learning and the benefits of each

  We make available both community service and service learning opportunities for all faculty members. Some faculty are not as willing to, in their minds, "give up" teaching time for service learning, but we want them and their students involved. Therefore, we give suggestions of how the community service project could easily be adjusted to become a service learning project.

- is aware of school climate and the receptiveness of individual teachers and students to the concept of service learning

  We have consciously made an effort not to force these activities on any student or faculty member, but to offer them as opportunities.

- is a facilitator and sees students, teachers, and parents as partners and resources

  We stress that the true benefit of participating in service learning activities is that the students have ownership of the projects and thus gain knowledge and self-esteem from their involvement.

- is patient but persistent

  When you work with different individuals and different levels of understanding, it is imperative that you be patient. Although you may be frustrated that the ideas may not be yours or that things do not move as quickly as you may wish, you cannot become discouraged and give up!

- is willing to act as a "salesperson" for service learning to school and district administrators, students, other faculty, and the community

  Many of our task force members have been asked to present at other schools, regional and national conferences, and to conduct workshops for other state departments of education.

- has a knowledge of the community and has numerous community contacts to form a network

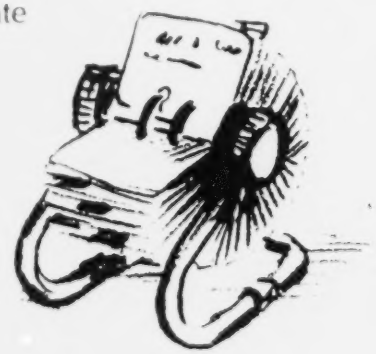
  Our most recent grant proposal called for involvement from the community. We had churches, county government, district school board, a local university, a technical college, local agencies, and senior citizen groups represented at our meeting. This could not have happened without someone on our task force knowing who and how to contact those we needed to be present.

- has a vision and the ability to plan and set goals

  Our members are committed to make our school the best it can be and to make our mission statement a reality for all. We are also committed to the idea that service learning has a vital role in reaching that goal.

- has a high energy level

  The time it takes and the effort to integrate service learning into all areas of the curriculum and for all students can be exhausting. All involved must work diligently.



Roles of Specific Task Force Members

All task force members contribute to the goals of the group. However, each has unique contributions to make due to their status.

Student Members

- Generate ideas
- Give feedback on projects and ideas
- Provide motivation to students and teachers
- Serve as Youth Consultants

Faculty Members

- Make ties to the curriculum
- Provide good organizational skills
- Share expertise and knowledge with other faculty members

Parents

- Provide support
- Allow access to community
- Donate time by being chaperones
- Volunteer to man posts during fundraisers

Service Agency Representatives

- Are valuable resources
- Identify needs and concerns
- Provide opportunities for service opportunities

Community Leaders

- Supply manpower in community projects
- Provide needs lists through awareness
- Allow many opportunities to serve
- Contact to local businesses and other organizations

Coordinator

- Prods members to take initiative as leaders of monthly schoolwide projects
- Keeps the lines of communication open
- Keeps topics and issues in front of all members
- Maintains awareness of needs and goals
- Sends reminders of monthly meetings
- Makes task force members aware of grantwriting and fundraising opportunities

Responsibilities of the Service Learning Task Force

The task force has a variety of responsibilities that it can effectively address. The service learning task force:

- takes the lead in helping the faculty and administrators link service learning activities directly to instruction and to the school's mission statement and goals

  We give out a list of "opportunities" to each faculty member and give "suggestions" on how different academic and related arts areas could implement the monthly service learning project.

- organizes groups of students to discuss interests and brainstorm ideas for possible service learning activities

  We have used focus groups of specific types of students, such as special education students, identified "at-risk" students, ethnic groups, and others, to make sure all voices are heard.

- coordinates staff development on service learning, including opportunities to attend and present at conferences, workshops, and site visits

  We try to make sure at least two students go when we present so they can sharpen their public speaking skills, learn from others, and have an opportunity to travel. Our parents are frequently invited to accompany us and often act as chaperones at conferences. As we become aware of opportunities, the task force makes sure other faculty members are made aware and encouraged to attend conferences and workshops. The task force members often hold fund raisers to help pay the expenses of those who will attend.

- oversees needs assessment

  In order to develop appropriate service learning opportunities, it is necessary to make all involved aware of the numerous opportunities for service in the community. Many counties publish a service organization list and often local civic organizations make available

a "wish list" during the holiday season. Another way to assess the needs of the community is to contact local or national organizations such as Hospice, American Heart Association, and the Alzheimer's Association. Students can be involved in securing or developing these lists as a service learning project where they incorporate their communication, organization, and keyboarding skills. Involvement of the community members of your task force is crucial in this step. This task needs to be done periodically. We have found that if we keep doing the same thing, the students lose interest.

- manages media attention and public relations

  As a part of the celebration component of service learning, our local newspapers and television news programs are kept abreast of the numerous projects. We have found we make "good copy," especially in a time where bad news seems to be the majority of the news.

- coordinates grant writing and other efforts for fundraising

  Members of the task force read numerous grant RFPs and, as a committee, decides which to apply for and who will work on the actual writing. This way the burden does not fall on one person, and input is valued from all members.

- provides information and resources on service learning as requested by others

  Our administration has given us a storage room to keep all materials for service learning. This is periodically updated and new materials are ordered as they are needed or become available. We are on numerous mailing lists and have easy access via the Internet to the Service Learning Clearinghouse. Parent volunteers keep copies of information and our school's service learning brochure available to be mailed out as requested by others or for use in presentations.

- encourages faculty members and students to become involved in opportunities for service

  At the beginning of the school year, the task force decides on schoolwide service projects for each month. For example, the month of September is dedicated to the Alzheimer's Association, with the final celebration being a two-mile walk to raise money for the Association. During the month, the seventh grade life sciences classes study the nervous system and prepare skits and presentations to teach others.

- provides for ongoing monitoring and evaluation

  Members of the task force reflect on the previous month's projects. We have found the student's own insight and knowledge of what the other students think of the projects are invaluable. Also, by evaluating teachers' comments about the service learning projects, changes can be made from project to project.

- shares decision making with all involved persons in order to foster a sense of personal ownership

  It is very exciting when the students decide what they need to do to get other students involved in the service opportunities. Some of the members have designed their own projects and presented them to the task force for possible inclusion.

- works with individual teachers to design and implement activities directly related to their subject area

  The entire faculty is aware of who the members of the task force are. They are given the list of the proposed schoolwide service projects and, as opportunities arise, are asked for ideas which can be connected to the curriculum. As task force members, we also try to take care of some of the logistics of each project such as arrangements for transportation, permission forms, and appointments.

Conclusion

The service learning task force at Wren Middle School has evolved over time. Its members have changed as students matriculated to the high school and as teachers have changed priorities. However, its influence is as strong as ever and, as situations change, it adapts and adjusts. Our task force was born when a few teachers attended a regional service learning conference with a small group of students. They had to leave the general session because the ideas started flying so fast. As one of the students said to one of the teachers as we brainstormed, "You are writing all of this stuff down, aren't you? It's good stuff we need to do." And so our task force was born and continues five years later because it's good stuff we need to do!

The result of having a successful service learning task force will be a changed school climate where students learn to care, faculty and students share positive relationships, and all are open to change. As teachers become more comfortable with the schoolwide projects and the curriculum integration possibilities, they are willing to involve their students in trying out new projects of their own. In addition, community partnerships and support flourish as our community agencies, businesses, and other organizations become more aware of the impact participating in service learning has on the students who will become our future citizenry.

We hope you consider the advantages of your own service learning task force, committee, or advisory board. You may be just the spark that ignites the flame that keeps the fire going, to light the way and give warmth to others through their involvement in service learning.

Resources

We mentioned the National Service Learning Clearinghouse. It has a great web site for information about other service learning programs, articles, and publications.

National Service Learning Clearinghouse
University of Minnesota
Vocational and Technical Education Building
1954 Buford Avenue, R-290
St. Paul, MN 55108
800-808-SERV
www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu

They can tell you who your regional training and technical assistance partner is.

- Our regional technical assistance center is the National Dropout Prevention Center, and they provide many good resources including staff development games and publications (like this one!).

  National Dropout Prevention Center
  Clemson University
  205 Martin Street
  Clemson, SC 29634-0726
  864-656-2599
  ndpc@clemson.edu
  www.dropoutprevention.org

- Funds for many service learning programs come from the Corporation for National Service, Learn and Serve America Program. They have a web site also.

  Learn and Serve America
  Corporation for National Service
  1201 New York Avenue, NW
  Washington, DC 20525
  202-606-5000
  www.cns.gov

- The National Youth Leadership Council not only sponsors the National Service Learning Conference each year. They also sponsor the Generator School Project.

  National Youth Leadership Project
  1910 West County Road B
  St. Paul, MN 55113
  612-631-3672
  www.nylc.org

About the Authors

Lynn Brown, special education teacher, has presented at state, national, and international service learning conferences, and uses service learning in reading instruction to benefit the Williamston Head Start program.

Treva Davis, fifth grade teacher, has presented at numerous service learning conferences. She uses service learning activities in her teaching of math skills to make lap robes for the elderly.

Mike Hughes, teacher of the gifted and talented fifth and sixth grade students and a Service Learning Ambassador, has presented at numerous state, regional, national, and international service learning conferences. His students tested water as part of science class and then offered this service to parents and businesses in the community. He was selected as Anderson School District One Teacher of the Year for 1997–1998.

Joyce Joy, seventh grade life science teacher, has conducted numerous service learning workshops as a Service Learning Ambassador for the state of South Carolina. She uses service learning as the teaching methodology for her unit on the circulatory and nervous systems to benefit the Alzheimer's Association and the American Heart Association.

Amy Parker, seventh and eighth grade teacher, has conducted workshops and presented at numerous service learning conferences. She uses service learning with her language arts students to make quilts for the Ronald McDonald House.

Susan Wolfe, fifth and sixth grade guidance counselor and a Service Learning Ambassador, has conducted workshops in many states and has presented at numerous service learning conferences. She serves as Service Learning Coordinator for Wren Middle School.

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